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BALAAM'S BIRTHPLACE.

[From Merrill's *East of the Jordan*.]

It is an interesting fact that Balaam, in some of the ancient records, is connected with the children of Ammon; and we present the following suggestions in regard to that soothsayer's home or country. In the first place we have Balaam's own account of the place where he belonged. "The king of Moab has brought me from Aram [Syria], out of the mountains of the east." Of the two other accounts one states that he was at "Pethor which is by the river of the land of the children of his people;" and the other that Balaam "was the son of Beor of Pether of Mesopotamia" (Numb. xxii., 5, xxiii., 7; Deut. xxiii., 4).

Aram Naharaim, rendered Mesopotamia, was no doubt supposed, at the time of the Septuagint translation was made to refer to the country between the Tigris and Euphrates. "Syria of the two rivers" may, however, without any violence to the language, refer to the region about Damascus. Indeed, this region bore the name of Syria from the earliest times. When the fact is considered, namely, that the region about Damascus and to the south and west as well, was called Syria, the statement of the Babylonian Talmud, Ernbin 19 a, becomes a significant commentary on the word "Naharaim or rivers." Speaking of the Garden of Eden, it is said: "If it is in the land of Israel, Bethshean is its gate; if it is in Arabia, Beth Gerem if its gate; if it is *between the rivers* Damascus is its gate." The Midianites act with the Moabites in calling Balaam. The messengers sent by Balak went and returned, and went and returned again, making four times that they passed over the region between Moab and Pethor.

Supposing Balaam's home was in Mesopotamia, they must have passed through the country of the Ammonites and Amorites, and of the strong people occupying the regions about Damascus, or else have gone entirely to the south or east of them by a desert route, of the existence of which nothing at present is known. The distance of Moab to the Euphrates would probably occupy twenty-four days or a whole month. Here would be four months consumed, to which must be added two months or more for Balaam to "return to his place," and to come back again in season for the battle in which he himself was slain. In making this journey Balaam rode upon an ass. Would a journey of such length, attended at all times with many hardships, where the stations for water are two to four days apart be undertaken on such an animal? Only camels would be thought of at the present time for crossing the desert. Another fact to be considered is that apparently very soon, if not immediately after Balaam *starts* from home, he is in a cultivated country. "The angel of the Lord stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side and a wall on that side." Balaam's foot was crushed "against the wall," (Numb. xxii., 24, 25). In the long stretch of desert between the Euphrates and the Hawran mountains, vineyards have never existed; while on the south-western slope of these mountains the remains of terraces show that vine culture was once extensive in that section. The same is true in the country about Heshbon, and also farther north, in the Jazer and Ammon regions. Again in Numb. xxii., 5, where we read "to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people"; the words "children of his people," בָנִים עֲמִים are in some manuscripts replaced by children of Ammon, בָנִים עֲמִים. "This reading is adopted by the Samaritan, Syriac, and Vulgate version. Communications between the countries bordering on the Euphrates and the Arnon must have been very frequent to have enabled the king of Moab to become acquainted with the name and character of a soothsayer, who lived in what was, at a later period, classical Mesopotamia. In view of these facts may not some reasonable explanation which shall relieve the matter of the difficulties attending the opinion that Balaam come from the Euphrates? On the other hand, Mr. George Smith, the Assyrian scholar, told us long ago, and the fact has since been stated by him in more than

one of his writings that Pethor and Mutkinu were two fortresses on the right or west bank of the Euphrates, These were held by Tiglath Peleser I. 1120 B. C. (See George Smith's "Assyria from the Monuments" pp. 32—34

BOOK NOTICES.

[All publications received, which relate directly or indirectly to the Old Testament, will be promptly noticed under this head. Attention will not be confined to new books; but notices will be given, so far as possible, of such old books, in this department of study, as may be of general interest to pastors and students.]

EAST OF THE JORDAN. *

The author of this book was appointed Archaeologist of the American Palestine Exploration Society on the 21st of October, 1874, and sailed from New York June 19th, 1875, arriving at Beirut August 9th. The author had charge of the exploration work for nearly two years, during which time he made four different expeditions. The labor in the field was carried on under the advice and direction of the Advisory Committee in Beirut. Since the author's return in the summer of 1877 he has been employed in the writing of his reports. Professor R. D. Hitchcock, D. D., the president of the society, furnishes a brief introduction in which he says:

"The present volume has assumed a popular form. Personal incidents enliven the narrative. The illustrations are fresh and original, many are from the author's own drawings. The book contains a large amount of matter wholly new. The author was careful and patient in his investigations, and now tells the story of his life beyond the Jordan, in a manner equally entertaining and instructive."

Comparatively little work has been done in exploring Eastern Palestine. Attention has been devoted for the most part to Western Palestine. This has been so not only because the latter is of a greater historic interest, but also because in Eastern Palestine traveling exploration have always been attended with difficulty and danger.

"And yet," as is stated in the introduction, "the historic associations belonging to the country east of the Jordan are rich and various. Two and a half of the twelve tribes that came out of Egypt under Moses, chose that side of the river for their home. Syrian, Assyrian and Chaldaean armies marched in and out there. Some of the disbanded veterans of Alexander settled there. It was beyond the Jordan that John the Baptist began and ended his official career. Nearly six months of our Lord's brief ministry were spent on the same side of the river. The Christian Church itself sought refuge there when the Roman legions began to close in upon Jerusalem. In the time of the Antonines the country was full of cities, with their temples, theatres, and baths. In the fifth century Christian Churches, well organized, were numerous and flourishing."

It is seldom that a book of this character is so interesting. The pleasure and profit afforded in its perusal have been more even than was anticipated. The author often leaves his narrative and gives his opinions with reference

**East of the Jordan*. By SELAH MERRILL, D. D., L. L. D. Archaeologist of the American Palestine Exploration Society. Introduction by PROF. ROSWELL D. HITCHCOCK, D. D. Illustrations and a map. 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 6, pp. xv, 549. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. For sale by Jansen, McClurg & Co., Chicago. Price, \$4.00.